

# VIRGINIA WOMEN IN HISTORY

# 2013

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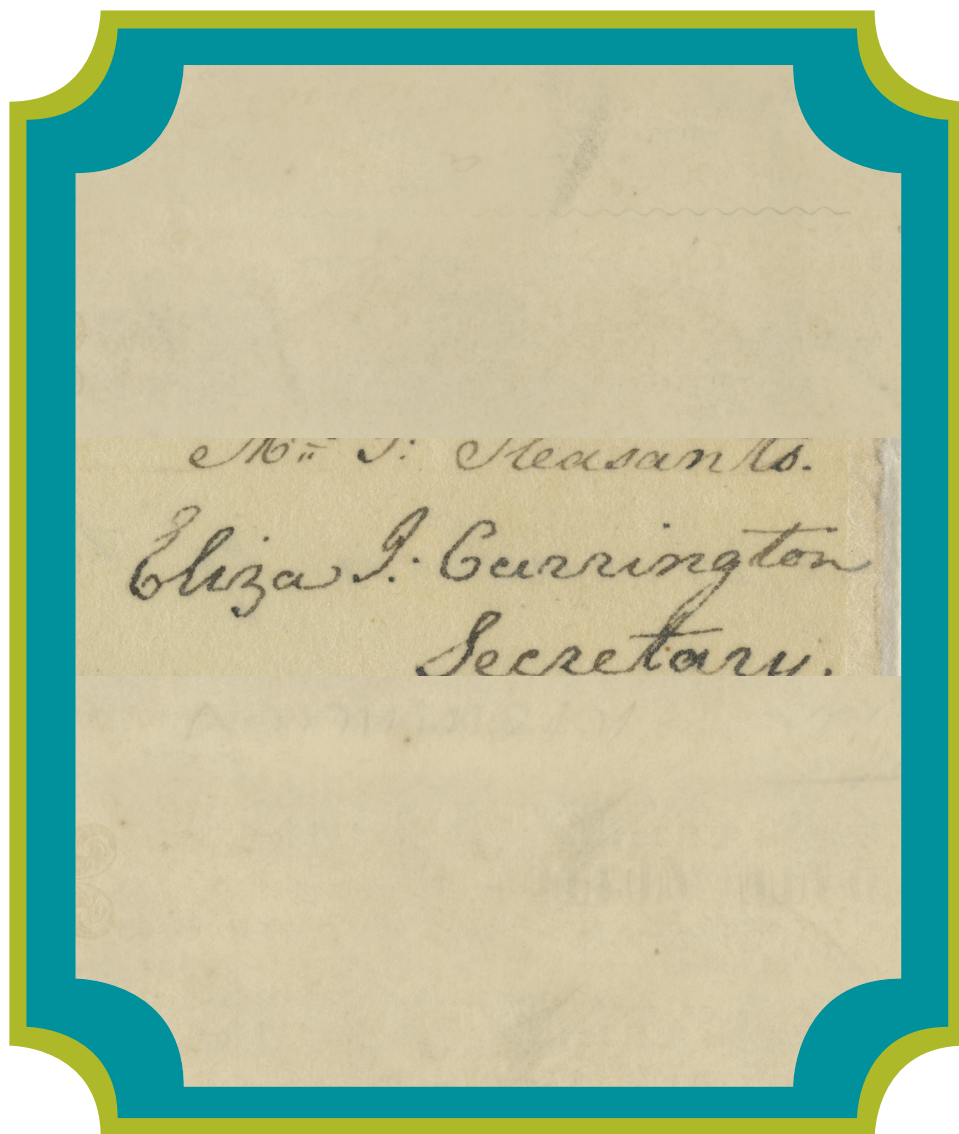
**Richmond Times-Dispatch**  
TimesDispatch.com

Women have played an integral part in Virginia from its beginnings, yet their contributions have often been overlooked in the history books. Until well into the twentieth century, written histories ignored women's critical roles as educators, nurses, lay leaders and missionaries, farmers, artists, writers, reformers, pioneers, business leaders, laborers, civic activists, and community builders. Today, we recognize and celebrate women's accomplishments in all walks of life, particularly in March, which Congress has designated as National Women's History Month. The Library of Virginia presents the **2013 Virginia Women in History** project to honor eight women, past and present, who have made important contributions to Virginia, the nation, and the world.

Learn more about Virginia women in the *Dictionary of Virginia Biography* (Richmond: The Library of Virginia, 1998–2006) and on the Library of Virginia's websites at [www.lva.virginia.gov](http://www.lva.virginia.gov) and [www.virginiamemory.com](http://www.virginiamemory.com).

Instructional materials and nomination forms for the 2014 project are available at [www.lva.virginia.gov/vawomen](http://www.lva.virginia.gov/vawomen).

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## Elizabeth Ambler Brent Carrington (1765–1842)

RICHMOND  
CIVIC LEADER

*Concerned about the plight of orphaned girls, Elizabeth Ambler Brent Carrington helped establish the Female Humane Association of the City of Richmond at a time when women rarely played a role in public affairs.*

The daughter of a prosperous merchant, **Elizabeth Jaquelin Ambler Brent Carrington** (March 11, 1765–February 15, 1842) married twice and remained a widow after 1810. Educated at home by her father, Carrington read widely and recognized the importance of education for young women. She was an active Episcopalian and her religious background and interest in education likely contributed to her enthusiasm in helping establish the Female Humane Association of the City of Richmond about 1805. She joined other prominent women in drawing up its constitution and bylaws early in 1808, and in 1810 the association successfully petitioned the General Assembly for an act of incorporation.

Known for her charitable endeavors and leadership, Carrington served as the association's secretary from at least 1810 until 1837. The association established an orphanage in 1813 and began holding an annual fund-raising fair in 1828. At a time when women rarely participated in public affairs, Carrington and the members of the Female Humane Association met an important social need that Virginia's government had ignored. The orphanage cared for and educated destitute white girls and enabled many children to avoid lives of poverty. The association's modern successor, the Memorial Foundation for Children, continues to support educational and cultural programs in the twenty-first century.

NOMINATED BY ALYSON TAYLOR-WHITE, CHESTER.





## Mary C. Alexander (1893–1955)

LYNCHBURG  
AVIATOR

*One of the first women to be licensed as a pilot in Virginia, Mary C. Alexander owned and operated a scheduled air service between Norfolk and Washington, D.C., during the 1930s.*

**Mary C. Alexander** (March 2, 1893–April 16, 1955) was one of the first women to become a commercial pilot. A native of Loudoun County, she resided in Lynchburg from about 1917 to 1935 and in 1924 became president of an automobile dealership. Soon after she divorced in 1929, she took flying lessons in New York and Baltimore and joined the Ninety-Nines, the first national organization of women aviators.

Because divorce was then rare and could leave a woman at a disadvantage, Alexander allowed people to believe that she was instead a widow. She spoke and wrote enthusiastically about women flying and stated that she saw no conflicts among her roles as mother, business executive, and aviator. She listed herself in the Lynchburg city directory as “aviatrix” a feminine variation on “aviator.” In 1932 the famed pilot Amelia Earhart referred to Alexander as “the flying grandmother.”

Alexander flew in numerous air shows, but she shunned high-risk barnstorming. About 1932 she acquired an air transport license and for almost two years she and her pilots flew scheduled air service between Washington, D.C., and Norfolk, using a Virginia Air National Guard airfield in Virginia Beach as the southern terminus. She continued to fly until the end of the 1930s when she took a desk job with Pan American Airways. Alexander retired early in the 1950s following her second marriage and lived near Washington, where she died in 1955.







## Louise Reeves Archer (1893–1948)

VIENNA  
EDUCATOR

*A highly respected teacher and principal, Louise Reeves Archer inspired her students through her dedication and commitment to their education.*

A dedicated teacher, **Louise A. Reeves Archer** (October 23, 1893–April 1, 1948) brought Vienna's African American community together in service to its school. Louise Reeves grew up in North Carolina and attended Livingstone College. She taught school in Southampton County, Virginia, where she married Romulus C. Archer Jr. in 1915. They moved to Washington, D.C., in 1922 and she continued her education, later earning a B.S. from Morgan State College.

In 1922 Archer became teacher and principal for a one-room segregated school in Vienna. Devoted to her students, she often transported children to school herself and worked to improve their learning experience. She organized a Parent-Teacher Association to raise funds for supplies and a new building, which opened in 1939 with three rooms. In 1941 students, parents, and faculty raised \$300, which paid for a music teacher, bus expenses, kitchen supplies, and the installation of electric lights. Archer also established one of Fairfax County's earliest 4-H Clubs for African Americans and her students participated in garden projects to raise vegetables for lunches prepared at school.

Archer provided a high-quality education. In addition to the academic curriculum, she taught sewing, cooking, music, and poetry to her students in fifth through seventh grades, which was then the highest level of public education available to African Americans in the county. After Archer's death, families petitioned the county to name the school in her honor. Louise Archer Elementary School continues to remember her service to the community with an annual celebration in her honor.

NOMINATED BY THE 2011–2012 FOURTH-GRADE CLASSES OF KRISTIN BEURMANN AND LAUREN WAGNER, LOUISE ARCHER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, VIENNA.





## Eva Fleming Scott (1926– )

AMELIA COUNTY  
LEGISLATOR

RECIPIENT OF THE VABPW FOUNDATION BUSINESS LEADERSHIP AWARD

*A pharmacist, Eva Fleming Scott was the first woman elected to the Senate of Virginia.*

**Eva Mae Fleming Scott** was the first woman elected to the Senate of Virginia. Born in Amelia County, where she has lived nearly all of her life, she attended Longwood College and the school of pharmacy at the Medical College of Virginia. She owned and operated a pharmacy in Amelia, where she married a businessman and had five children.

In 1971 Scott won election to the House of Delegates as an independent, even though she was from a Republican family. She was reelected three times and served four consecutive two-year terms. Soon after winning the first election she and her family moved to Dinwiddie County because a changed legislative district boundary temporarily put her Amelia County house in a different district. A champion of limited government and free enterprise, she opposed abortion and the proposed Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution.

In 1979 Scott returned to Amelia County to run for a seat in the Senate of Virginia. Having gained the Republican nomination, she narrowly defeated the incumbent. Scott served one four-year term in the Senate and chose not to run for reelection in 1983 after major changes to the district boundaries made it more difficult for her to win. She thereafter worked in the family's lumber business, and she continues to be active in conservative political organizations and in the Republican Party.







## Ann Compton (1947– )

ROANOKE  
NEWS CORRESPONDENT

*An award-winning journalist, Ann Compton broke new ground as the first female White House correspondent for a national news organization.*

Born in Chicago, **Ann Compton** graduated from Hollins College and began her news career as the first woman reporter at Roanoke's WDBJ television station. Making her mark covering state politics in Richmond, she left in 1973 to become a staff reporter for ABC News in New York. The following year she became the first female correspondent, and one of the youngest, assigned to the White House on a full-time basis.

Compton has covered each president from Gerald Ford to Barack Obama, while also reporting on presidential campaigns and political conventions and twice sitting as a panelist on presidential debates. She was the sole broadcast reporter allowed to remain on Air Force One as the president flew across the country on September 11, 2001, for which she and her production team won Emmy and Peabody awards.

Honored many times for her accomplishments, Compton has been elected to the Journalism Hall of Fame (2000), the Radio Hall of Fame (2005), and the Virginia Capitol Correspondents Association Hall of Fame (2012) and served as president of the White House Correspondents' Association. In recent years she has served as a national correspondent for ABC's online and radio news outlets. Compton is a popular speaker who provides firsthand insights into White House politics and the presidents she has covered.





## JoAnn Falletta (1954– )

NORFOLK  
MUSICIAN

*A dynamic and compelling conductor, JoAnn Falletta is an advocate for contemporary music.*

A native of New York, **JoAnn Falletta** graduated from the Mannes College of Music, and earned a degree in orchestral conducting from The Julliard School. From 1986 until 1997, she was music director of the Women's Philharmonic, in San Francisco, an orchestra founded to champion music composed by women. She is the music director of the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra; principal conductor of the Ulster Orchestra, of Belfast, Northern Ireland; and the artistic director of the newly formed Hawai'i Symphony.

Since 1991 Falletta has also served as music director of the Virginia Symphony Orchestra, in Norfolk. Under her direction it has become a leading regional orchestra and in 2010 it received an American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP) award for adventurous programming in recognition of performances of contemporary works.

Falletta has conducted the premieres of more than 100 works by American composers. She is recognized for her innovative programming, and she has compiled an impressive discography of almost seventy titles. Falletta has long mentored student musicians and, through the League of American Orchestras, has led seminars for women conductors.

The winner of the Stokowski Conducting Competition in 1985, Falletta has received several prestigious conducting awards and has been honored several times by ASCAP. In addition to membership on the National Council for the Arts, Falletta has a star on Norfolk's Legends of Music Walk of Fame and in 2011 she was named Norfolk's Downtowner of the Year.







## Cleo Elaine Powell (1957– )

BRUNSWICK COUNTY  
JUDGE

*The first African American woman to serve on the Supreme Court of Virginia, Cleo Elaine Powell encourages young people to create a culture of diversity and respect for the law.*

Raised in Brunswick County, **Cleo Elaine Powell** “dreamed of being a servant of the law. I aspired to ferret out injustice.” She earned a degree in American government at the University of Virginia in 1979 and her Juris Doctorate at the university’s law school in 1982. She joined the Richmond law firm Hunton & Williams, where she specialized in labor and employment law.

Powell entered the public sector in 1986 where she served as a senior assistant attorney general in the Equal Employment Opportunity and Personnel Division until 1989. After a brief stint as corporate counsel and director of employee services for Virginia Power, she was appointed a judge of the Chesterfield County and Colonial Heights General District Court in 1993. Seven years later she was appointed to the Chesterfield Circuit Court. Named to the Virginia Court of Appeals in 2008, Powell was the first African American woman to sit on an appellate court in the state. In 2011 the General Assembly elected her to a twelve-year term on the Supreme Court of Virginia. One of three women on the court, Powell advocates diversity in the legal profession. Throughout her career, Powell has mentored young attorneys and often speaks to young people to encourage them to reach their full potential and make a positive difference.

NOMINATED BY GLADYS D. WILDER, MEDIA SPECIALIST, ON BEHALF OF EMANI MCCRAY AND ARIEL MOORE, FIFTH-GRADE STUDENTS (2011–2012) AT SWANSBORO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, RICHMOND.







## Elizabeth Inez Pruitt (1962– )

TANGIER ISLAND  
PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT

*Elizabeth Inez Pruitt fills a vital need in the isolated community of Tangier by serving as its primary health care provider.*

A lifelong resident of Tangier Island, **Elizabeth Inez Parks Pruitt** serves the community as its primary medical officer. Under the tutelage of Dr. David Nichols, the island's primary care physician who commuted to Tangier once a week, she ultimately became a physician assistant and now operates the local health clinic.

Known for its distinctive dialect, Tangier Island is isolated in the northern reaches of the Chesapeake Bay and can be reached only by aircraft or boat. It is home to a dwindling community of watermen; providing immediate medical care has always been a challenge. Pruitt—who can trace her lineage on the island back several generations—became intrigued by the medical profession early in life when a doctor stayed with her family during his occasional visits to Tangier from the Eastern Shore. She entered the medical field as a dental assistant in 1984, and in 1987 began her long relationship with Nichols as his assistant. In 2001 Pruitt entered the physician assistant program at the University of Maryland–Eastern Shore, at first commuting almost daily by boat. She received her diploma in 2006.

Beginning in 2004, Pruitt worked with fellow residents, Nichols, and many supporters to replace the island's ramshackle clinic with a new \$1.7 million complex. After Nichols's death in 2010, Pruitt became the primary health care provider to Tangier's roughly 500 residents. "I enjoy making a difference in the lives of others. The world should be a better place because a person has lived."

NOMINATED BY THE 2011–2012 TENTH-GRADE CLASS OF  
DUANE CROCKETT, TANGIER COMBINED SCHOOL, TANGIER.





1. Elizabeth Ambler Brent Carrington

2. Mary C. Alexander

3. Louise Reeves Archer

4. Eva Fleming Scott

5. Ann Compton

6. JoAnn Falletta

7. Cleo Elaine Powell

8. Elizabeth Inez Pruitt

[www.lva.virginia.gov/vawomen](http://www.lva.virginia.gov/vawomen)

